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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6099
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RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN IMMEDIATE 0645
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 3246
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID IMMEDIATE 5668
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SUBJECT: RABAT POL COUNSELORS INFORMAL DISCUSS WESTERN
SAHARA

Classified By: Classified by Polcouns Craig Karp for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Spain hosted Polcounselors from U.S., U.K., France and EU-President Germany for an informal discussion of Western Sahara developments March 14. In general, participants noted the intensity of Moroccan diplomatic efforts, including multiple consultations with U.S., France, and Spain. The energy of the initiative, however, did not appear to be matched by any apparent breakthrough on the substance of autonomy that could convince the other side. The broad outlines of the autonomy plan, which have been universally briefed, suggested Rabat would retain full control, and did not go far beyond what was in the 2003 plan. That had been rejected out of hand by Baker and governments.

¶2. (C) The French continue to broadly support the Moroccan position. They believe that the GOM effort should be encouraged by the UNSC by some explicit mention and also support encouraging the parties to negotiate. After some informal discussions with Van Walsum, the French were concerned that SYG Ban Ki Moon will be very conservative on his report to the Council. It will be his first and he will likely want to keep the text of the last report. The French continue to insist on self-determination, but the act of self-determination can be an institutional arrangement that is endorsed by a vote that comes way down the line. They were to have formal discussions with Van Walsum in Paris this week

¶3. (C) The Germans will try to forge a common European position but are not confident of doing so. For Europe as a whole, the principal interest is that Morocco has been an island of stability in a crucial but shaky near neighborhood. This stability must be preserved, so a solution to the Sahara problem that destabilizes Morocco proper is undesirable.

¶4. (C) The Spanish host was not happy. For Spain, the Sahara is now a hot domestic political issue. Last week, in the joint declaration of the Zapatero visit, they had agreed to a statement cautiously praising the Moroccan proposals as a basis for progress. The Algerians then raised the price of gas exports to Spain by a hefty amount described in the press as 20 percent. (Comment: This move, possibly worth hundreds of millions of dollars, may have been in the cards anyway. End comment.) The Spanish Parliament unanimously (including Zapatero's own Socialist party) appeared to repudiate this

endorsement by voting for a bill proposed by leftist splinter parties to return to the historical Spanish approach focusing on self-determination. King Juan Carlos, in Algiers this week, tried to dodge the issue and was accommodated by Bouteflika. FM Moratinos, with the King in Algiers, published an op-ed walking the cat back on the Moroccan proposals, stressing Spanish rejection of unilateral solutions, and support for negotiations without preconditions.

¶5. (C) Polcouns briefed on his recently completed trip to Sahara. GOM consultation with the Sahrawi has been minimal, but there appeared to be interest in the prospect of a plan. Local observers believe that most of the original Sahrawis were still opposed to Moroccan overlordship, but they now admitted to being a minority of current population in the territory. Both pro and anti-government Sahrawis mostly want to manage own affairs, the difference is trust, which is eroded by continuing, if modestly abating, human rights violations. It appeared that the Moroccans have put in a lot of work on their proposals, and it now looked like they will at least have a plan to put on the table in April, but no one has yet seen anything that will win many additional Sahrawi hearts and minds.

¶6. (C) Algeria remained a thorny question for all. Algiers is beginning to react to the GOM diplomatic offensive, but has stuck tightly to its insistence on the Baker formula. France said Algiers is like a boxer in a corner, and could lash out. Levers to persuade them are few, as the Spanish have discovered. Opening the border with Morocco will benefit the Kingdom and Algeria both, but the latter doesn't need it. The only fruitful area of collaboration, as noted by the German, was counterterrorism, but this may not be enough to foster a rapprochement. Russia may have some

influence with the Algerians, but the French said their Embassy in Moscow commented that the Russian were unlikely to play a constructive role (apparently without having directly posed the question to the GOR). They unhappily recalled GAZPROM-SONATRACH discussions on forming a cartel. The French believed that giving the Algerians some formal status in the negotiations, not as a party, which they refuse, but as a Godfather (parrain) could provide some incentive.

¶7. (C) On next steps, the French have advised the GOM to present their plan first to the UNSYG to include in his report, and to the April UNSC president, the UK. The U.K. said they expected to see a Moroccan draft during their UNSC presidency.

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